

2009

# Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African-American Identity

Booth Library

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# WRAPPED IN PRIDE: GHANAIAN KENTE AND AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY

An Exhibition Hosted by  
Booth Library  
Eastern Illinois University  
February 1 - March 10, 2009



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Dear Friends,

It is with pleasure that we welcome you to Booth Library's newest major exhibit, *Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity*. How exciting it is to have such an impressive collection of artifacts and artisan works in Charleston as Eastern celebrates African American Heritage Month 2009.



There is much to learn from this exhibit. Few persons from our region will have previously seen so much African weaving close enough to touch. Many of us should review the rich cultural heritage of Ghana and the political developments of Western Africa over the past century. We can become more attuned to the art of weaving and use of raw materials to make cloth, skills highly prized in our local culture just a couple or three generations ago.

Notice the rich listing of local resources available to you, to your friends and students, found in this brochure. Booth Library resources come from many decades of collecting in areas relevant to this exhibit's theme. Materials from the array of topics are included, demonstrating the history and highlighting the changes which have taken place in America with respect to the understanding and maturity of race and culture.

Help us involve citizens of the region in this opportunity for enhanced understanding of African influences on Illinois culture. You, too, can make a difference by practicing the true oral tradition of spreading the word, incorporating new information into your vocabulary, and becoming fluent with kente, the history of Ghana, and additional African American writers and poets.

Our gratitude is extended to the National Endowment of the Humanities and their work with the Mid-America Arts Alliance and the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History. Their efforts to make available this traveling exhibit have been enormous; our community has been enriched through our participation.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allen Lanham". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Allen" and last name "Lanham" clearly distinguishable.

Allen Lanham, PhD  
Dean of Library Services





# WRAPPED IN PRIDE: GHANAIAN KENTE AND AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY

Thursday, February 5, 2009

Opening Reception

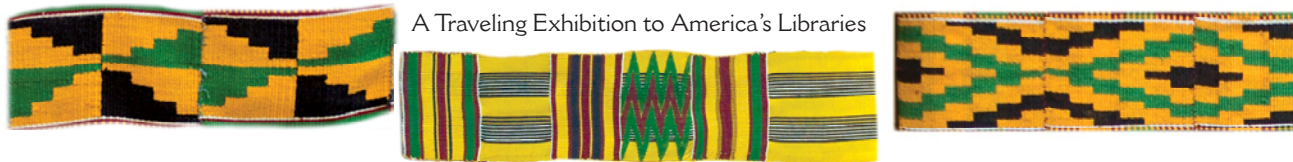
7:00 p.m.

Booth Library Marvin Foyer

Opening Program

7:30 p.m.

Booth Library West Reading Room



A Traveling Exhibition to America's Libraries



## Welcome

Allen Lanham, Dean of Library Services

## Greetings

Blair Lord, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

## Recognition of Faculty Presenters and Curators

Karla Kennedy-Hagan, Chair, Library Advisory Board

## Closing

Allen Lanham, Dean of Library Services

## Refreshment Table

Bakeshop Delights

Snacks of Kente Color

Natural Juices

## Opening Program

7:30 p.m. Booth Library West Reading Room

## Kente in Context

Robert S. Petersen, Presenter, Associate Professor, Art





## Guide to the Exhibit

The exhibition *Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity* is divided into two broad sections: first, it traces the roots of kente in Asante and Ewe cultures, in what is now central and eastern Ghana and parts of Togo, and its widespread use in Africa as garment and ceremonial cloth; then it explores kente as a meaningful document of dress, art, and identity in American cultures, specifically within African American communities in the United States.

### Marvin Foyer and North Lobby

#### *Introduction*

The exhibition begins with the oral tradition that credits Ananse, the wise spider character from Akan oral literature with the introduction of weaving to the Asante heartland; a second oral tradition about kente origins attributes its introduction to a man name Ota Kraben who brought the technology from the north. Images of a chief and queen mother in kente complement the men's and women's cloths on display.

#### *The Market*

To give a sense of the rich variety of kente cloth and its by-products, a small kente "store" is recreated to provide visitors a sense of the various cloths found in these markets for sale.

#### *The Colors of African Unity*

Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first political leader is remembered today for his central role in achieving Ghana's political emancipation from British colonial rule, and he remains an important figure in the history of African independence movements. Nkrumah was responsible for making kente visible on the world stage. This section highlights the independence of Nkrumah and Ghanaian

#### *A Calendar of Cloth*

This section traces the contextual use of kente in African American communities for celebrated calendar-based events, as well as other occasions not specifically tied to the calendar such as weddings, church events, and Afrocentric marketplaces. This section foregrounds materials collected and documented by high school classes in Los Angeles, Newark, and other cities.

### Ballenger Teachers Center

#### *Kente and Childhood*

Kente themed toys and books help children connect to an African identity. Several dolls, including "Ghanaian Barbie" are on exhibit in the Ballenger Teachers Center, along with a selection of children's books on African themes.





### *A Beautiful Cloth Does Not Wear Itself*

This section focuses on the appropriate modes of wearing kente in Ghana and the variety of contexts in which kente defines the occasion as much as any other item of expressive culture. Photographic displays present chiefs' installations, the wearing of kente by gods in shrines and by the deceased at funerals, and colorful festival processions.

### *The Fine Art of Asante Kente*

Included in this section are selected masterworks of Asante weaving that demonstrate the accomplishment of the art; the importance of each cloth name, which is rooted in the rich oral literature of the Asante, is also explained. Most cloths are identified by their warp (lengthwise) stripe patterning, though rarely is there a relationship between the pattern and its name.

### *The Fine Art of Ewe Kente*

Neighbors of the Asante to the east, the Ewe (pronounced ay-vay) have their own version of kente, with an equally long history. Ewe cloth is distinguished from that of Asante by the incorporation of representational weft-faced (crosswise) motifs such as stools, daggers, an assortment of proverbial messages suggested by animal imagery, and by the occasional use of words woven into the strips.

### *What's in a Name? Warp Designs*

Among the Asante peoples of Ghana, kente cloths are purchased as much for their names as for their beauty. As the cloths exhibited here demonstrate, cloth (warp stripe) names are derived from a variety of sources, including famous people, especially chiefs and queen mothers; natural phenomena; historical events; and proverbs. Complex designs are also woven into the crosswise, or weft, threads. These tend to have names taken from the environment and culture of the Asante. There are more than one thousand warp and weft names, and new patterns are being invented all the time.

### *What's in a Name? Weft Designs*

Unlike the patterning of the lengthwise warp threads, most weft designs (woven across the warp threads) are named after objects—knives, bellows, combs, hats, etc. Also unlike most warp patterns, weft-faced designs tend to resemble their names. Some Asante kente cloths feature a single weft motif (adwen) repeated throughout, but more commonly a cloth will incorporate a number of designs. When weft designs are inserted into every available warp segment, the cloth is identified as Adweneasa, translated as “my skill is exhausted” or “my ideas are finished.”





### *Kente at Graduation*

The wearing of kente to mark the achievement of graduation dates back to at least the late 1950s in Ghana. In the United States, kente stoles have become more and more commonplace at university graduations. While initially worn only by African American graduates, over the last ten years they have been included in more diverse commencement ceremonies, as well as in other contexts.

### *Kente and the State of Grace*

African-style vestments and dress have been adopted by many faiths over the past forty years. While kente's role in the church is most pronounced during African American History Month, it appears throughout the year as drapes for pulpit and altar, as Bible covers, on the vestments of choirboys and church ushers, and on choir and ministerial robes.

### *In a Funeral Mode*

The death, funeral, and burial rites of important chiefs, queen mothers, and venerated elders, and the subsequent installation and enstoolment ceremonies for the successor are also occasions for the selective use of kente. In addition to the deceased occasionally being dressed in kente, his or her funeral bed may be covered with the cloth and in some areas the funeral room is draped in kente.

### Library Atrium

#### *The Weaving of Kente*

Asante kente weaving is defined and described through video documentation of the weaving process, two Ghanaian narrow-strip looms, weaving technology photo panels, and hands-on raw materials, including completed kente strips.

#### *Portraits of Kente*

The exhibition concludes with images of prominent African American leaders who have been photographed wearing and using kente. Visitors are encouraged to consider issues of fad and fashion and reflect on the meanings and forms of kente in African American life.

#### *Crossing the Atlantic*

Photographs of former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere and African American historian W.E.B. Du Bois introduce a section that examines the spread of kente beyond Ghana and its association with African unity and "Back to Africa" movements of the 1950s and 1960s.

#### *Touch These Kente!*

You are welcome to touch these cloths. Experience cloths made by a distinctly different technologies. Can you tell the differences in the feel of cotton and rayon? Are the weaves equally fine in all these examples?





## Programs



February 5

7:30 p.m. Booth Library West Reading Room

### Kente in Context

Robert S. Petersen, presenter, associate professor, Art

Kente cloth has an important symbolic meaning in Ghana especially with regard to royal ranks and public honors. It has in recent times also become powerfully evocative as a broader symbol of African Culture abroad. This talk will examine the development of kente traditions and some of its traditional uses within Ghana as well as some of the more recent works that kente cloth has inspired.

Robert S. Petersen is an Associate Professor of Art at Eastern where he teaches courses covering Africa, India, Southeast Asia, China and Japan. Dr. Petersen graduated with a BA from University of Santa Cruz in Art, an MA in Performance Studies from Brown University, and a PhD from the University of Hawaii at Manoa in Asian Theatre. In 1988, Dr. Petersen received a Fulbright scholarship to study the traditional arts of Indonesia and has since published numerous articles and essays on popular and traditional culture in India, Southeast Asia, and Japan.



February 17

4:00 p.m. Library Conference Room 4440

### A Self-Efficacious People: Yearning to Learn

Mildred Pearson, presenter, assistant professor,  
Early Childhood, Elementary, and Middle Level Education

As a recent invited guest at the African Methodist Episcopal University in Liberia, Dr. Pearson will share her experiences with the African people. In particular, she will share how African people have been self-efficacious in their pursuit for freedom, dignity, and honor, particularly in education. In her sojourn, she served as acting president with 71 full-time instructional personnel, and approximately 4,000 students.

Dr. Mildred M. Pearson serves as Director of Faculty Development at Eastern and teaches in the College of Education and Professional Studies. Her research interests include self-efficacy, self-regulation, resilience and gender differences. She earned her BA in English education from Langston University, MEd from University of Central Oklahoma, and EdD in Curriculum and Educational Leadership from Oklahoma State University. She is the author of *A Time for Deeper Dialogue: Mentoring, Modeling and Growing Your Own*.





February 19

7:00 p.m. Library Conference Room 4440

### Kente Iconicity and “Black Atlantic” Cultural Politics

Klevor Abo, presenter, instructor, African American Studies

This presentation situates the rise of the brightly colored kente as an internationally recognizable icon of Black pride in three interwoven strands of history: the European colonization of West Africa, the movements for African political independence and civil rights in the United States, and the emergence of “Black Atlantic” elites in Africa, the Americas, the Caribbeans and Europe. An examination of these histories is critical for an understanding of the deployment of the kente and other cultural artifacts and practices in the making of global African identities.

Klevor Abo is a member of the core teaching faculty in the African American Studies program at Eastern. He holds a PhD in American Culture Studies from Bowling Green State University, Ohio. He began his academic career in his native Ghana, at the University of Ghana, his undergraduate alma mater. Dr. Abo’s teaching and research interests revolve around the nature and character of the political and cultural relationship between the African continent and its diasporas.



February 24

7:00 p.m. Library Conference Room 4440

### Film – *Daughters of the Dust*

Ann Boswell, moderator, professor, English

An award-winning and wonderful, beautiful film directed by an African American, Julie Dash, about the Gullah culture of South Carolina, and how Gullah people cherish the ways of their West African ancestors (1991).

Parley Ann Boswell is a professor of English at Eastern, where she teaches courses in American Literature and Film Studies. She received her MA in colonial American history from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and a PhD in English from Loyola University. Dr. Boswell is the author of several essays on film and American literature, and has also published *Reel Rituals: From Baptisms to Funerals in Hollywood Film, 1945-1995* (Popular Press, 1999), and *Edith Wharton on Film* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2007).





February 26

4:00 p.m. Library Conference Room 4440

An Introduction to Kofi N. Awoonor: Reconciliation and Atonement  
in *Comes the Voyager at Last: A Tale of Return to Africa*

Michael Loudon, presenter, professor, English

Arguably Ghana's premiere postcolonial poet, Awoonor's work spans several genres and five decades. Interweaving poetry and prose, myth and history, Awoonor moves from exile and satirical critique of modern Ghana in *This Earth, My Brother* (1971) toward return and reconciliation *Comes the Voyager...* (1992). This lecture introduces Awoonor's work through selected readings from and commentary on his poetry with an emphasis on his mythic rendering of returning to Africa as an Ewe man soon to serve as representative to the United Nations of the nation that had once detained him on subversion charges for nearly a year. Awoonor's career exemplifies the compassion of black humanism that fashioned his politics of poetry and the poetics of politics.

Michael Loudon is a professor of English and has taught at Eastern for the past 25 years. He completed his AB at Wabash College in Indiana and his MA and PhD at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He served as Acting Coordinator of the African American Studies Program, 2006-2008. He has taught courses on the British Romantic poets, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century American literature, African American literature, Native American literature, Anglophone postcolonial literatures, cultural studies and criticism, and, with colleagues in the Department of Philosophy interdisciplinary courses in Cultural Foundations. He studied Gandhian nonviolent resistance in India as an undergraduate, was Fulbright Professor of African American Literature in 1990-91 at the University of the West Indies—St. Augustine in Trinidad, taught at the University of Guam in 2002, and participated in Study Abroad—Cape Town, South Africa in 2007.





March 3  
4:00 p.m. Library Conference Room 4440

## The Ceremonial Aspects of Ghanaian Kente

Johnson Kofi Kuma, presenter, professor, Library Services

Johnson Kofi Kuma, a native of Ghana, will present a workshop on the ceremonial aspects of Ghanaian Kente. His presentation will include a slide presentation and discussion.

Johnson Kofi Kuma is a Reference Librarian at Booth Library, Eastern. He received his BS in Biology from Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven, MLS in Library and Information Science from St John's University in New York, and MA in Political Science from Eastern. Johnson is a subject bibliographer for African American Studies, Biological Sciences, and Technology. He loves to explore the western landscape of the United States of America.







## Concurrent Activities



Celebrating African American Heritage Month at Eastern Illinois University

Yes We Can! Celebrating the Past, Forging a New Future



### February 2

7-9:00 p.m. 7<sup>th</sup> Street Underground  
*Yes We Can: A Celebration of History in the Making*

### February 3

11:30-1:30 p.m. Oakland Rm, MLK Union  
*Eating for a Healthy Life and Soul*  
Presenters: James Painter and Karen Armour

5:00 p.m. Coleman Hall Room 1255  
*Hope and History: The Obama Presidency and the Fate of Racism*  
Presenter: Dave Roediger

### February 4

12-1:30 p.m. Charleston/Mattoon, MLK  
*Diversity in America and its Impact on Education*

7:00 p.m. Coleman Hall Room 1255  
*China in Africa*  
Panelists: Michael Loudon, James Ochwa-Echel, Roger Beck, Teshome Abebe

### February 5

6:00 p.m. Lumpkin Hall Room 2030  
*The Mis-education of a Black Greek*

### February 6

5:00 p.m. Grand Ballroom, MLK Union  
Heritage Month Banquet with  
*A Killing in Choctaw*: Carl Ray's one-man play

### February 7

12-4:00 p.m. Effingham Room, MLK Union  
*S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Women's Workshop*  
Presenter: Rhonda Bowdry

6:00 p.m. Grand Ballroom, MLK Union  
*Gospel Explosion*

7:00 p.m. Buzzard Auditorium  
*Miracle at St. Anna*: Film

### February 9

7:30 p.m. Doudna Lecture Hall  
*Conversations in Color*  
African American Heritage Film Series  
Moderators: Klevor Abo, Zeta-Yolanda Williams, Cleopatra Watson, Janice Collins

### February 10

7:00 p.m. Effingham Room, MLK Union  
*President Barack Obama: A Black Man in the White House*  
Panelists: Loudon, Boykin, Anderson, Horton, Hardeman, Brown

### February 11

7:30 p.m. Doudna Lecture Hall  
*Conversations in Color*  
African American Heritage Film Series  
Moderators: Klevor Abo, Zeta-Yolanda Williams, Cleopatra Watson, Janice Collins

### February 12

7:20-9:00 p.m. Lumpkin Hall Room 2030  
*Know Your Heritage*

### February 16

9-4:00 p.m. Martinsville Room, MLK  
*BASUAH HIV Testing*

7:00 p.m. 7<sup>th</sup> St Underground  
*Getting Off and Getting Intimate: Black and White Fraternity Men's Approaches to Women*  
Presenter: Rashawn Ray

### February 17

7:00 p.m. Effingham Room, MLK Union  
*EIU's Tuskegee Airman and Other Coles County Ties to Black Aviation History*  
Presenter: Doug Lawhead

### February 18

6:00 p.m. Greenup Room, MLK Union  
*Faith panel/lecture*  
Presenter: Norman Greer

### February 19

5:30 p.m. Doudna 1090 Black Box  
*Janice Harrington, poet & author*  
Host: Tim Engles

### February 20

6:00 p.m. Grand Ballroom, MLK Union  
*Conversations in Color: Presentation of Students Video Contest*

### February 20-21

*EIUnity Conference*

### February 22

11:30 a.m. University Ballroom, MLK Union  
*Bringing the Church to Campus*

7:00 p.m. Doudna Recital Hall  
*Africanist Chamber Music*  
Host: Klevor Abo

### February 23

7:00 p.m. 7<sup>th</sup> St. Underground  
*Cater to You - Pamper Party*

### February 24

7:00 p.m. 7<sup>th</sup> St. Underground  
Miss Independent: Panel Discussion

### February 25

7:00 p.m. University Ballroom, MLK Union  
*Let the Women Take the Stage*  
Open Microphone

### February 26

7:00 p.m. Grand Ballroom, MLK Union  
*New Illusions: Hair Show*

### February 28

7:00 p.m. Grand Ballroom, MLK Union  
*Miss Black EIU Pageant*

10:00 p.m. University Ballroom, MLK Union  
*Miss Black EIU Union Party*

Sponsored by

African Student Association, Black Student Union, Delta Sigma Theta, EIUnity, Faculty Development, History Department, Housing Services, Minority Affairs, National Association of Black Journalists, Phi Beta Sigma, Student Life, TRIO, University Board, Zeta Phi Beta

A Traveling Exhibition to America's Libraries





*Special thanks* to Joseph and Dorcas Appianing for sharing their Ghanaian clothing for the exhibition, and their consulting expertise on creating adinkra cloths, fantasy coffins, and how to properly display kente cloths.

### *The Adinkra Cloth*

Adinkra cloth is a hand-printed fabric traditional to the Asante people of Ghana, West Africa. Adinkra literally means *goodbye* which is reflective in artistic symbols linked with consoling proverbs. Adinkra cloth is known to be worn by leaders in mourning and during remembrance ceremonies. Not only are the symbols artistic, they also communicate philosophical and moral values of the Asante. Most Adinkra symbols can be found woven into Kente cloth strips, which are often used as borders for the Adinkra cloth.

Jeanne Goble and Johna Shackles, Library Specialists, Booth Library, curators

### *Beyond Africa: Hand Woven and Embroidered Textiles from Central and Southeast Asia*

Not only in Africa, but also throughout the world, native peoples developed textiles distinctively their own. Central and Southeast Asia were no exceptions. Featured in this exhibit are such items as Indonesian Ikats from East Sumba, Hmong tribal costumes from the hills of Thailand, a betel bag from East Timor, Cambodian kalagas and decorative embroideries from Uzbekistan. Also on display are the implements of weaving, including a partial loom frame, shuttles, and decorative loom pulleys.

Robert Hillman, professor, Booth Library, curator

### *Fashionably Dead?*

The Ga people of Ghana construct fantasy coffins that honor the memory of their loved ones. Many of these coffins reflect the interests or professions of the deceased while they were living such as a hammer for a carpenter, a chicken for a farmer, or a fish for a fisherman. Imagine your loved one being transported in the after life in a beautifully crafted representational Mercedes, Cadillac, Coca-Cola bottle, or a stylish shoe.

Jeanne Goble, Stacey Knight-Davis, Johna Shackles, and Jacqueline Worden, curators





## *Ghanaian Craftsmanship*

The items in this exhibit highlight various art forms from Ghana collected during a visit in 2003. Wood and fabric arts are included.

Natasha Gibbens-Amartey, curator

## *Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity: The Socio Cultural Aspects*

The exhibit depicts the role played by Ghanaian Kente on the social and cultural life of diasporan Africans.

Johnson Kuma, curator

## *Ghanaian Kente from a Chicago Collection*

Lender: Mr. Bennett Agyman of the Asanteman Association of Chicago and Midwest—a subdivision of Ghana National Council of Metropolitan Chicago

Materials provided by

Willie Morris, Vice President of EIU African Students Association



## *Local Spinners and Weavers*

The Countryside Spinners and Weavers Guild was formed in 1972 by a group of individuals interested in the fiber arts. Members have come from Charleston, Mattoon, Paris, Chrisman, Vandalia, and other surrounding towns. Spinning produces yarn or thread. It was first done on a drop spindle. Available now are a variety of spinning wheels. This group uses processed fiber from sheep, alpaca, dogs, rabbits, cotton, flax, and the new synthetic fibers of soy silk, tencel and bamboo to produce yarn. Weaving on a loom produces cloth. Beyond spinning and weaving, individuals of this guild also do knitting, crocheting, dyeing, silk fusion, basketry, bobbin lace, and other fiber related activities. The exhibit brings together pieces woven by local artisans.

Margaret Speer, curator





Arthur Public Library, 225 South Walnut, Arthur, IL 61911  
Athens Municipal Library, 410 East Hargrave St., Athens, IL 62613  
Carnegie-Schuyler Library, 303 East 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, Pana, IL 62557  
Mattoon Public Library, 1600 Charleston Ave., Mattoon, IL 61938  
St. Joseph-Ogden High School, 301 North Main, St. Joseph, IL 61873

Alice Cisna, Director  
Donna Cunningham, Director  
Janet Hicks, Director  
Ryan Franklin, Director  
Katherine Fell, Librarian

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### Popular Ewe and Akan Proverbs

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A beautiful cloth does not wear itself.

A proverb is the wisdom of all and the wit of one.

One Head does not go into Council.

The linguist makes the chief's words sweet.

It is through small things that a village is established.

When a chief dies, it is said, "A great tree has fallen."

No one goes to the house of the spider to teach it wisdom.

No one knows the story of tomorrow's dawn.

One who follows the track of the elephant never gets wet from the dew on the bushes. *(One is safe behind a powerful chief.)*

If a bird has a long bill it uses it to eat on its own side of the stream and not for stretching across the river. *(This could be a warning not to interfere with someone's land, as streams were often property boundaries.)*

If a horse does not go to war, its tail does. *(This refers to the part of the war paraphernalia of chiefs or captains, and it means it is one's responsibility to contribute to a function even if one cannot personally attend.)*

The river fish's game is no safe game. *(No good can come from playing with a dangerous man.)*

When you are safe on the bank, then you can tell the crocodile that it has a lump on its snout. *(Don't make remarks about someone dangerous unless you are quite sure you are out of his reach.)*

The thread follows the needle. *(A teacher or elder can provide wise guidance to the pupil.)*

The crocodile does not drown in a river. *(I am invincible!)*





## Background for Enrichment and Exploration

Freely adapted with permission from *Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity*:

*A Curriculum Resource Unit* by Lyn Avins and Betsy D. Quick. Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History

Ghana is located on the southern coast of the great bulge of West Africa and is bounded by Togo, the Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso on the east, west, and north. The country measures 420 miles from south to north and averages 270 miles in width, roughly the size of Great Britain. Ghana can be divided into three environmental zones: a flat coastal plain runs inland for as much as fifty miles and is covered with grass and scrub; a forest zone covers much of southwest Ghana; and the northern savannah covers two-thirds of the country north of the forest. The climate is relatively warm, with an annual mean temperature of 70-83 degrees and relative humidity on the coast of more than 90%.

The great mix of languages and ethnic groups in Ghana point to a complex history. It is generally understood that stone-age humans probably first inhabited Ghana roughly half a million years ago. About 2000-1500 B.C.E., knowledge of agriculture and pottery appears in the archaeological record; iron tools were developed between 500 and 1000 C.E., with technologies such as brass casting and weaving appearing later.

Beginning about 1500, numerous states rose in power, establishing powerful kingdoms, each with centralized authority. The rise of these states was, of course, related to the growth of trade in the southwest, especially in connection with the exploitation of gold resources in the area. European influences began in 1471 with the landing of the Portuguese on the coast. Various European powers exchanged trinkets and luxury goods for gold and slaves.

By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a number of smaller states, each with its own chief, joined together to create the powerful Asante Kingdom in the Gold Coast. Through military conquests, the kingdom expanded, until by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Asante controlled many of their Akan neighbors. Their economy was based largely on agriculture (the cultivation of yams, plantains, and maize) and on gold exports to both northern Islamic peoples and Europeans on the coast, in exchange for metalware, cloth, and European weapons.

Early 19<sup>th</sup> century missions by British envoys Thomas Bowdich and Joseph Dupuis sought to create trade relations with the Asante who exercised control over the interior of the Gold Coast. In 1821 the British government took control of trading forts on the Gold Coast, and in 1844 chiefs in the area signed an agreement with the British that opened the door to colonial rule in the coastal area.

In 1874, the British proclaimed the Gold Coast a colony, and in 1896 many senior officials were exiled by the British, bringing the Asante confederacy to an end. With the partitioning of colonial territories following World War II, Ghana's borders were redefined as they exist today. On March 6, 1957, Ghana regained her independence, the first African nation to do so in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



## *The Making and Design of Kente Cloth*

The strip-woven cloth called *kente*, made by the Asante peoples of Ghana and the Ewe peoples of Ghana and Togo, is the best known of all African textiles. Its renown has spread internationally so that it is now one of the most admired of all fabrics. What began in the former Gold Coast as festive dress for special occasions—worn by men as a kind of toga and by women as upper and lower wrappers—has, over the past 40 years, been transformed into hats, bags, shoes, and many other types of apparel, including jewelry.

Although the term *kente* is popularly used throughout much of the world, its origins are heavily contested. In written records it dates back to at least 1847 when a man's cloth of twenty-seven strips was accessioned into a Danish collection as a "cotton blanket (kintee) from Popo," an Ewe town in present-day Togo. Significantly, *kente* is not the indigenous word for the cloth in either of the two cultures that produce it.

Venice Lamb suggests that the word *kente* is derived from the Fante word for basket, *kenten*. Since the coastal Fante were not weavers, it is plausible that they would use a word named for a familiar genre (woven baskets) that seemed technologically similar to an unfamiliar one (woven cloth).

Both the Asante and Ewe weave on the horizontal narrow-band treadle (pedal) loom. This is the basic loom type throughout most of West Africa, an area framed on the west and south by the Atlantic Ocean, on the north by the edges of the Sahara Desert, and on the east by the area around the present eastern border of Cameroon—a region of almost two million square miles. Men remain the primary weavers of *kente*, although a few women are known for their weaving skills. Children as young as five assist in the weaving process, particularly in the unwinding of skeins of thread and winding of bobbins.

The weaving process involves four distinct series of tasks: the threads must be wound off skeins and laid out in whatever color pattern is desired for the strip, the loom is threaded with the prepared warp threads, a sufficient length of *kente* is woven for the desired finished cloth, and the narrow strips are sewn together lengthwise to complete the process. It is a painstaking process—a 24-strip double weave man's cloth may require four days to 'warp the loom' and four months to weave the strips.

Most strips are identified by their warp-stripe pattern. The majority of cloths consist of identical strips generally woven on a single long warp; thus, the cloth takes its name from the warp stripe of its strips. Less common, but not unusual, are cloths made up of two or more different warp patterns. These are typically called *Mmaban*, defined by Lamb as "mixed" or "there are many."

The names given to Asante *kente* are richly varied. Because they are primarily tied to striped patterns, however, it is rare to find any correlation between name and pattern. Many cloths are named after important chiefs or queen mothers, and some of these are connected with important historical events. Others take their names from the plant or animal kingdom or from other natural phenomena. The enormous corpus of proverbs that are used to explain the meaning of most Akan art forms also figure prominently in the naming of cloths.

Unlike warp patterns, most weft designs are named after objects, for example, Sekan (knife), Afa (bellows), and Afe (comb). Weft designs are rarely named after individuals or proverbs, although, if pressed, most weavers could quote an appropriate proverb for a given object or design.

Some Asante kente cloths feature a single weft motif (*adwen*) repeated throughout, but more commonly a cloth will incorporate a number of designs. The most extensive use of *adwen* occurs in a cloth identified as Adweneasa, and these cloths are characterized by weft designs inserted into every available block of plain weave. Adweneasa is typically translated as “my skill is exhausted” or “my ideas are finished.”

In kente...

- the cloth is composed of several narrow strips sewn together lengthwise;
- the individual strips often show a vertically-striped pattern of colors, and these striped patterns vary from cloth to cloth;
- the striped pattern sections often alternate with motif sections so densely woven that they sometimes completely conceal the vertical stripe pattern;
- the geometric motifs within those sections may be repeated and/or varied to create a vast array of chevrons, checkerboards and other shapes;
- as the weaver sews the strips together lengthwise, s/he carefully aligns the designs to create an overall diagonal, checkerboard or perhaps random effect.

### *The Pan-African Movement and Kente in the United States*

Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, kente has moved far beyond the borders of Ghana. The brightly patterned cloth has come to convey a powerful message of African unity and its influence has spread across the Atlantic. In the last several decades, it has become one of the most popular symbols of African American identity. On both sides of the ocean, then, kente is recognized as a proclamation of a proud association with the rich heritage of the African continent.

The global spread of kente and its transformation into a potent symbol were preceded by the emergence of the Pan African Movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its aim was to unify Africans and African Americans in their struggles for enhanced social and political power. Throughout Africa, people began to rise up against their colonizers in a quest for political independence and freedom. At the same time in the United States, African Americans sought expanded rights and organized to make their voices heard. The Pan African Movement gave both Africans and African Americans an ideological basis for their respective struggles.



A series of Pan African Congresses held between 1901 and 1945 brought together important Black leaders, such as the African American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), and Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972), an African of Akan origins who would later become the first president of the newly independent nation of Ghana. In the United States, the movement was further fueled by the development of a number of important organizations, the most famous of these being the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), established in 1909, and still an active force in the Civil Rights movement. Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey also inspired many African Americans with the establishment of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1920. This organization promoted Garvey's philosophy of "Africa for the Africans" and supported his "Back to Africa" movement.

Within the context of the Pan African Movement, African and African American leaders established suitable symbols to represent their beliefs. Marcus Garvey articulated a visual language for those who identified with Africa by announcing that red, black, and green—symbolizing blood, skin color, and new life, respectively—officially represented "the colors of the Negro Race." Kwame Nkrumah, following in the footsteps of W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, among others, led Ghana to independence on March 6, 1957. From Ethiopia, who largely avoided colonial domination, Ghana borrowed and inverted the green, yellow, and red colors of the Ethiopian flag for its own national flag and added a black star, the "lodestar" of African freedom.

Garvey's ideas on color symbolism affected the thoughts and actions of Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah, who contributed, perhaps most profoundly, to the global visibility of kente as a symbol of African identity. During his historic visits with President Eisenhower in Washington, D.C., in 1958 and 1960, Nkrumah and his entourage wore kente often; in fact, *Ebony* covered the visit in the article "The Return of Saturday's Child," illustrated with 31 photographs, 13 of them showing Nkrumah in kente. In 1963, African American W.E.B. Du Bois traveled to Africa at Nkrumah's invitation and wore kente when he was awarded an honorary degree by the University of Ghana. By choosing kente for important and highly visible occasions, these and other leaders have helped to establish it as a potent symbolic image for Africans and African Americans alike.

Originally reserved for royalty and the elite in Ghana, kente is now available to almost everyone who has the desire to incorporate it into his or her lifestyle. It is now used in a variety of circumstances that differ dramatically from its original context. While the cloth worn by a chief is carefully woven in separate strips and sewn together to be elegantly draped by its royal wearer, contemporary kente-inspired clothing is often printed, not handwoven, and sewn into fitted garments to be worn by the general public. Both woven kente and printed versions are used for display purposes today, as articles for the home, decorative backdrops, or to add a special African flair to a setting. The cloth and references to it are incorporated into a wide array of African American celebrations, including Kwanzaa, Martin Luther King Day, Black History Month, Juneteenth, and others, as a fundamental symbol of a proud African American identity. Kente's popular symbolism is just as varied as its users and its usage, but it continues to communicate a complex and dynamic African identity.



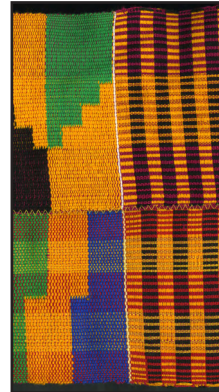


## *Selected List of Local Resources*

In this selected resource list you will find materials from Booth Library collections touching on themes presented in the kente exhibition. From children's books to journal articles, from musical compositions and videos to Ghanaian histories and geographies, from weaving manuals to African American poetry and art: all find their way here in hopes of enriching your enjoyment of the exhibit. If you set upon a journey through literature that explores the routes of trade and migration or the influences of kente within the culture of the United States today, then our work will have been worthwhile.

You will notice that the list is divided into sections based on location of materials in the library. For those of you exploring the writings of particular authors or subjects, please consult our online catalog to find additional materials. If items are already in use by another patron, then feel free to request other copies from our sister libraries around the State using I-Share and other online catalogs. Library staff will help you do this or you may also use our interlibrary loan services. You will be notified when those materials are ready for delivery or pick-up.

If you are new to some of the topics of our exhibit, you may want to begin consulting some of the reference materials listed or with several books from the Ballenger Teachers Center collection. The themes are presented in a more concise manner and will whet your curiosity for more in-depth items to be found in the bookstacks.







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*Huggy Bean and the Origin of the Magic Kente Cloth.* New York: Gumbs & Thomas, 1992. 21p.  
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## Electronic

Booth Library has an extensive collection of electronic resources. Assistance with electronic resources is available through Reference Services. Here are examples of what you will find. Try using keywords mentioned in any other item from our research list.

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"Kente Cloth of Ghana" *African Arts* 3.3 (1970): 26-29. JSTOR

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"The Verbal Art of Akan Linguist Staffs"

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## from Ghana Calls by W.E.B. Du Bois

I lifted up mine eyes to Ghana  
And swept the hills with high Hosanna;  
Above the sun my sight took flight  
Till from the pinnacle of light  
I saw dropped down this earth of  
crimson, green and gold  
Roaring with color, drums and song.



Happy with dreams and deeds worth  
more than doing  
Around me velvet faces loomed  
Burnt by the kiss of everlasting suns  
Under great stars of midnight glory  
Trees dances, and foliage sang;



Yet Ghana shows its might and power  
Not in its color nor its flower  
But in its wondrous breadth of soul  
Its Joy of Life  
Its selfless role  
Of giving.





Natasha Afua Gibbens-Amartey's interest in Ghanaian culture began in 1999 while on a National Student Exchange and became stronger while living and working in Ghana in 2003. Much of her undergraduate and graduate studies at the University of New Mexico and Eastern have focused on Ghana. Natasha is married to Ekow Franklin

Jeanne Goble is a library specialist in the Ballenger Teachers Center of Booth Library. She holds English, education, and library science degrees from Eastern. Jeanne has interests in the arts, children's literature, and international folklore and customs.

Robert Hillman is a professor at Booth Library, and serves as university archivist and as a reference librarian. He holds a BA in English and religion from Principia College, an MA in cultural research from the University of Illinois at Springfield, and an MLIS from Brigham Young University. As exhibit curator for "Beyond Africa: Hand Woven and Embroidered Textiles from Central and Southeast Asia," Mr. Hillman has selected items from his own collection of Asian textiles.

Stacey Knight-Davis is an assistant professor and reference librarian at Booth Library. She serves as subject librarian for health studies, physics, nursing, and geology/geography. Stacey holds a MS in library and information science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and a MS in Technology from Eastern. Stacey serves as Booth Library's exhibits coordinator, and her participation has been critical to several exhibitions hosted by the Library.

Johna Shackles is a library specialist in the University Archives and Reference Services at Booth Library. She holds a BA from Eastern. Johna is also currently working on her MS in technology and in educational leadership. Johna enjoys the challenges that exhibits provide and the opportunity to immerse herself into a culture that is not her own.

Jocelyn Tipton is an associate professor and serves as Booth Library's government documents librarian and subject bibliographer for political science and psychology. She holds an MLS from the University of Maryland and an MA in political science from Eastern. Ms. Tipton is a frequent contributor to Booth Library exhibits and her leadership and collaboration with others on the installation of this exhibit is appreciated.

Jacqueline Worden is a senior library specialist in Reference Services at Booth Library. Jackie has a BS from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where she combined her interests in natural sciences, art, writing and teaching. She has an MEd from Eastern in Information Services and Technology. She has taken many art studio courses at Eastern, including weaving. She traveled to South Africa for a photo safari last summer and loves learning about other cultures!



*Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity*

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